

Dear Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Committee on Human Services:

My name is Stephany Melgar Montoya. I am twenty two years old. I am studying architecture at Norwalk Community College. I am undocumented. I am also a member of CT Students for a Dream, we are a statewide organization that fights for the rights of immigrant youth and our families. I support HB 6616: a law on expanding Husky health benefits for those who are ineligible due to their immigration status. Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need.

I have lived in Stamford for four years and my parents and siblings arrived two years ago. We are from Peru, and coming here was a great change in our lives, where we have had and continue to experience great challenges. But everything is in search of a better future, like most immigrants when they come to this country.

As a child, I was diagnosed with heart problems, these were a heart murmur, Wolff Parkinson White syndrome, and Ebstein's anomaly. I was always on checkups, EKGs, echocardiograms. When I was 11 years old, I had a cardiac catheterization to close the murmur in my heart. Throughout my childhood and teenager I went through a lot of tachycardia due to Wolff Parkinson White. At the age of 15 I had surgery in Peru for this syndrome. Everything went well until a few months later it reappeared, and at the age of 16 I operated again.

In the check-ups that I have here, the doctor told me about Ebstein's Anomaly and how important it was for me to have constant tests, to see if an operation was necessary or else I could run the risk of the anomaly growing and being very dangerous for me. On my first few tests I received a bill for \$5,000. I panicked because I knew that the tests had to be constant and I couldn't cover such high expenses over and over again. It was very difficult for me to get the necessary help to cover part of them. The doctor told me that my Ebstein Anomaly was very peculiar, there were few such cases, and he also explained to me that if I had to have an operation, it would be an open heart operation and that the only places where they could do it is at Columbia Hospital in NY or in Yale Hospital in New Haven. When I found out I fell apart and was very scared. I was just able to cover part of my medical expenses in Stamford, and now I had to make myself see some of those hospitals where the bill would be much higher.

It was not just the fear if the operation would go well, but the fear of how I would pay for the operation, I cannot have HUSKY since I am undocumented. After a year I was able to apply for financial aid at Yale, and there they told me that I am fine for now but that I have to continue having constant checkups in the future. But the fear continues since every year I have to request this help where I am not completely sure if they are going to give it to me and if I were to have an operation, it is very likely that with this help it will not be possible to cover the entire cost.

I believe that, like my case, there are many similar or worse cases, where families, because they are undocumented, do not receive the necessary health care. And that despair of not knowing what to do, where to seek help, feeling somehow alone is horrible. That is why giving HUSKY to immigrants would be a great help and support for us. It could help save many lives that due to poor medical attention or not receiving any, their diseases became complicated. It is not about which country you are from, it is rather a support between humans, where one helps the other in difficult and delicate moments. Health is a fundamental human right, but unfortunately it is very expensive and not very accessible, especially for immigrants. That's why I support HB 6616 and ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work to open access to all immigrants, regardless of age.

Thanks for your time,
Stephany Melgar Montoya